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## Josephine, Josie, Jo

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josephine,

josie, jo

by julie koslowsky

illustrated  
by ailisa qualkinbush





#### Author's Statement:

This work of feminist children's literature was inspired by Aimee Carrillo Rowe's article, "Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation." Rowe's theory of relational belonging suggests that our identities are made in relation to the individual people we come into contact with as well as the communities of people with whom we engage. Since our surroundings are constantly changing this suggests that our identities are consistently altered as well. I have taken this theory and translated it into a format palatable for children. The result of this translation is the following work.

You can find Rowe's article in the NWSA Journal; Summer 2005, Vol. 17 Issue 2, p 15-46.

#### Acknowledgements:

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On the way home from school Jo walked  
with her Mom and little brother Teddy  
to the park.

Mom opened the park gate  
and Jo ran straight for the slides.  
She loved the slides because she could go super fast  
and she always landed on her feet at the bottom.

Jo saw her classmate Darius starting to climb up the biggest slide in the park  
and ran over to the ladder to climb up with him.





"What are you doing?!"

Darius scowled.

"I just thought we could  
slide down together,"  
Jo replied sheepishly.

"No Josie!" Darius yelled.

"We're not park friends!  
We're just school friends!"

Jo slunk back to Mom  
wondering what Darius  
meant.





On the way home Jo asked, "Mom, why doesn't Darius want to be my park friend? He is always really nice to me at school, but in the park he was being really mean."

"Well," Mom explained, "some people don't understand that no matter where you are, you're still the same person. People sometimes act differently when they are with different people or in different places. You wouldn't yell and scream in the library, right?"

Jo thought about the time Teddy yelled in the library and everyone was very mad, but Teddy yells at home when he plays with Jo and Mom doesn't mind.

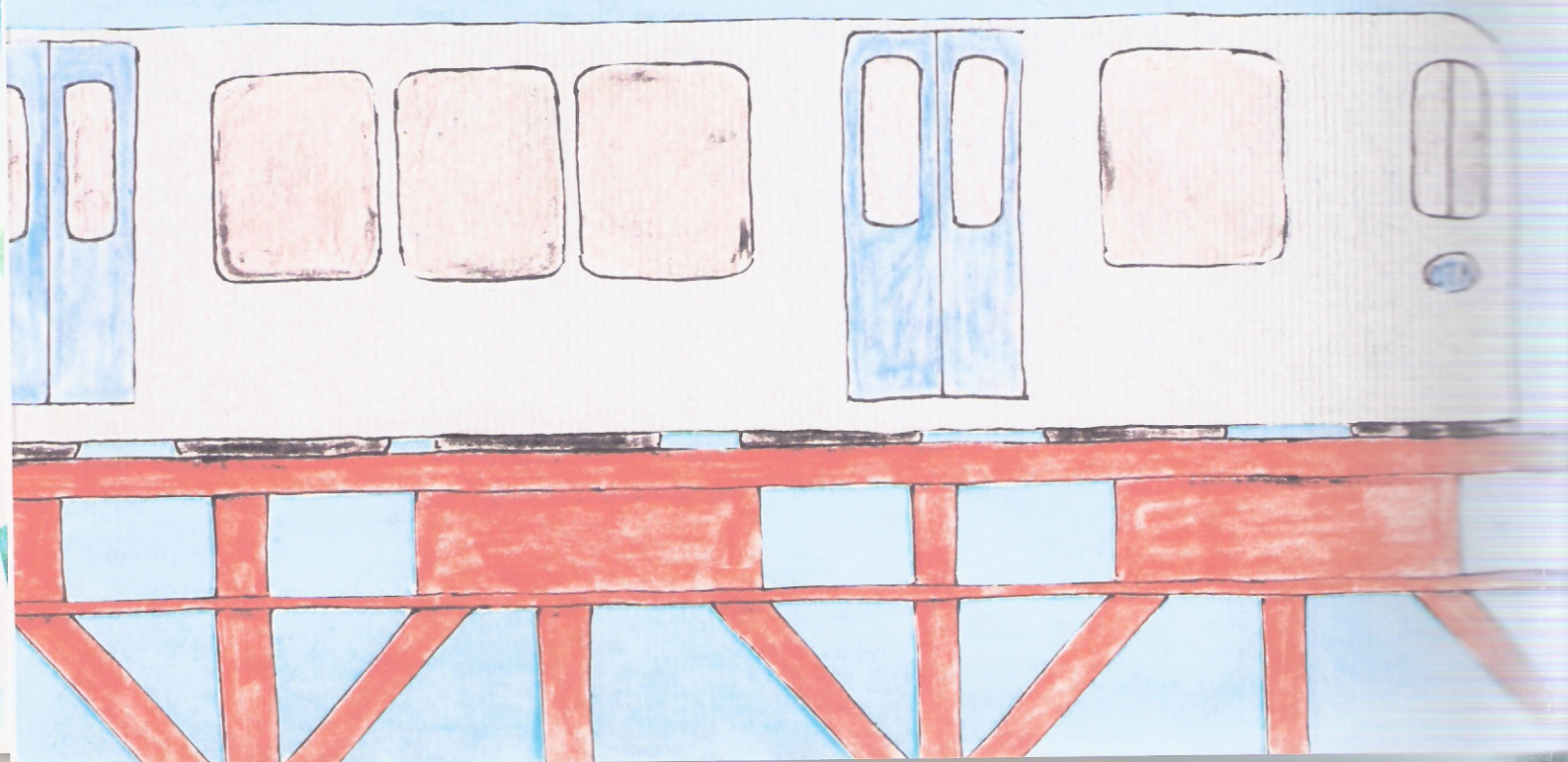
"I guess people do act differently sometimes," Jo said.

"But I don't know if I can invite Darius to my birthday party anymore because he said we're just school friends, not park friends."

"Since this is your first big birthday party the guest list is up to you," Mom said. "But you do need to decide who to invite very soon. Your party is only two weeks away."

"I guess." Jo sadly tapped her feet on the seat in front of her.

"Maybe I just won't invite Darius to my birthday party."









At home Jo told Grandma and Grandpa what Darius had said at the park. Mom worked at the stove preparing Jo's favorite dinner of stir fried vegetables and brown rice.

"Josephine, please set the table. Dinner is almost ready," said Mom.

"Mom, please don't call me Josephine. Call me Jo!"

Jo said as she slid out of her seat to get the plates and cups for dinner.

"But my little one, Josephine is your name," Mom insisted.

"Of course it's my name, Mom, but that doesn't mean you have to use it! I'm Jo!"

"Yeah, call her Jo!" piped up Teddy.

When Teddy first started talking the name Josephine was much too big a word for such a little mouth to say, so Teddy would shout, "Jo!" whenever he wanted his big sister.





Grandma, who Josephine was named after, offered a different perspective.

“There’s nothing wrong with shortening your name. Remember that your name is part of your identity, but that your identity can shift depending on who you are with or where you are.

Maybe Darius was trying out a new identity at the park today and that’s why he acted differently.”





Later that night, after Jo had brushed her teeth and put on her favorite yellow feety pajamas, she lay in bed thinking about Darius and Grandma and her guest list.

Jo's sixth birthday party was coming up very soon and that guest list certainly wasn't going to write itself.

"I wonder what Grandma meant by 'identity'," Jo thought to herself.

"I wonder what other 'identities' I have.

And what about my birthday party?

What name and what 'identity' should I use then?"

Jo thought about all of the different nicknames she had and how she changed when she was in different situations.





At school she had always asked her téachers to call her Josie.  
Since preschool Jo's best friend Wing-Yee insisted that she use the name  
Josie at school, so that their names would have the same E sound at the end.





Jo also thought about how at soccer practice  
her teammates and Coach Chris had always called her Jo-jo  
because it's a great name to chant.

One time Jo was dribbling to the goal  
and a player from the other team accidentally tripped her.

Jo got to have a penalty shot.

When she lined up ready to kick the ball  
her teammates waiting on the sidelines started yelling,  
"Jo-jo, Jo-jo, Jo-jo!"

Jo kicked and the ball went straight over the goalie's head!






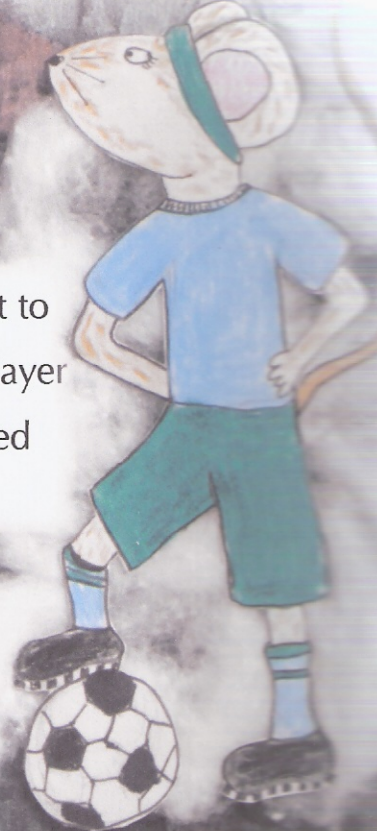
The whole team cheered  
"Jo-jo, Jo-jo, Jo-jo!"









Did she want to  
be a daughter  
and be called  
Josephine?




Did she want to  
be a soccer player  
and be called  
Jo-jo?



Did she want to  
be a school friend  
and be called  
Josie?



Did she want to  
be a big sister  
and be called  
Jo?



Lying in bed thinking about all of these different nicknames, and as Grandma says,  
“identities”, Jo began to wonder what name she wanted to be called at the party.



Each "identity" would allow Jo to invite different people to her party,  
but how to choose?

Jo decided to head up the back stairs to Grandma and  
Grandpa's apartment. Jo hoped that Grandpa could  
help her through this dilemma.

He was always a good listener.





Upstairs Jo crawled onto Grandpa's lap as he sat in the big green comfy chair crumpling his newspaper as she went.

"Grandpa," Jo sighed, "I don't know who to invite to my party. I know so many people, but I'm worried that they each only see one part of me and I'm afraid that they won't understand the other parts."

Grandpa listened intently to her concerns. He could tell that Jo's brain felt very heavy with the weight of all her identities.

"Well Jo, I love all of your names and identities. I'm sure if you give your different friends the chance they will love all of you too. Besides," Grandpa added, "this is your first big birthday party with all of your friends. I think it would be nice to see everyone together in one place to celebrate such a special day. You only turn six once, so let's make this a great party."







Finally, the day of Jo's birthday party arrived.

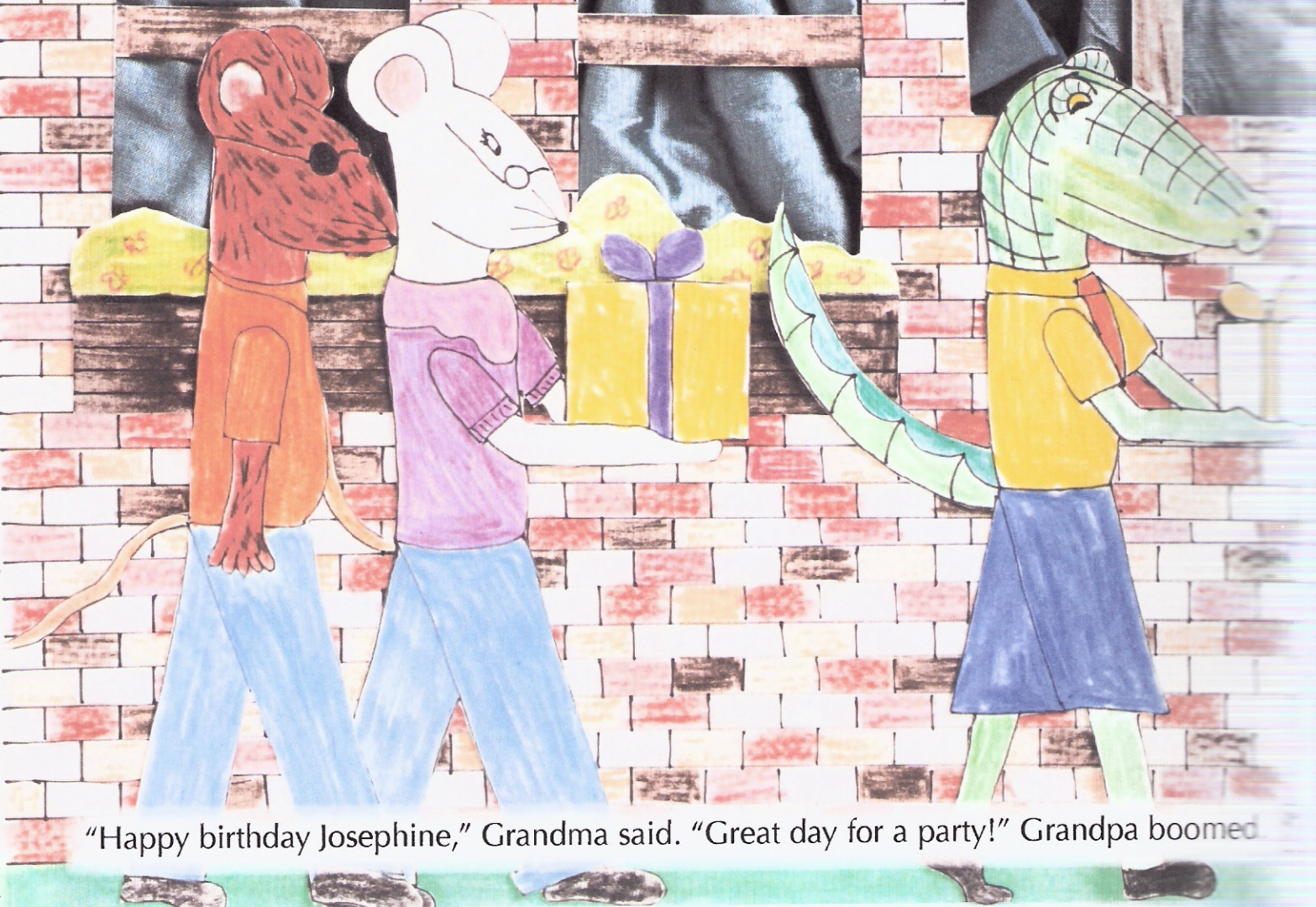
Jo was so excited she could barely contain herself and bounced back and forth from the yard to where Mom was in the kitchen icing her giant birthday cake.

Just when Jo didn't think she could wait any longer she heard a knock at the backyard gate.

One by one Jo's guests arrived.

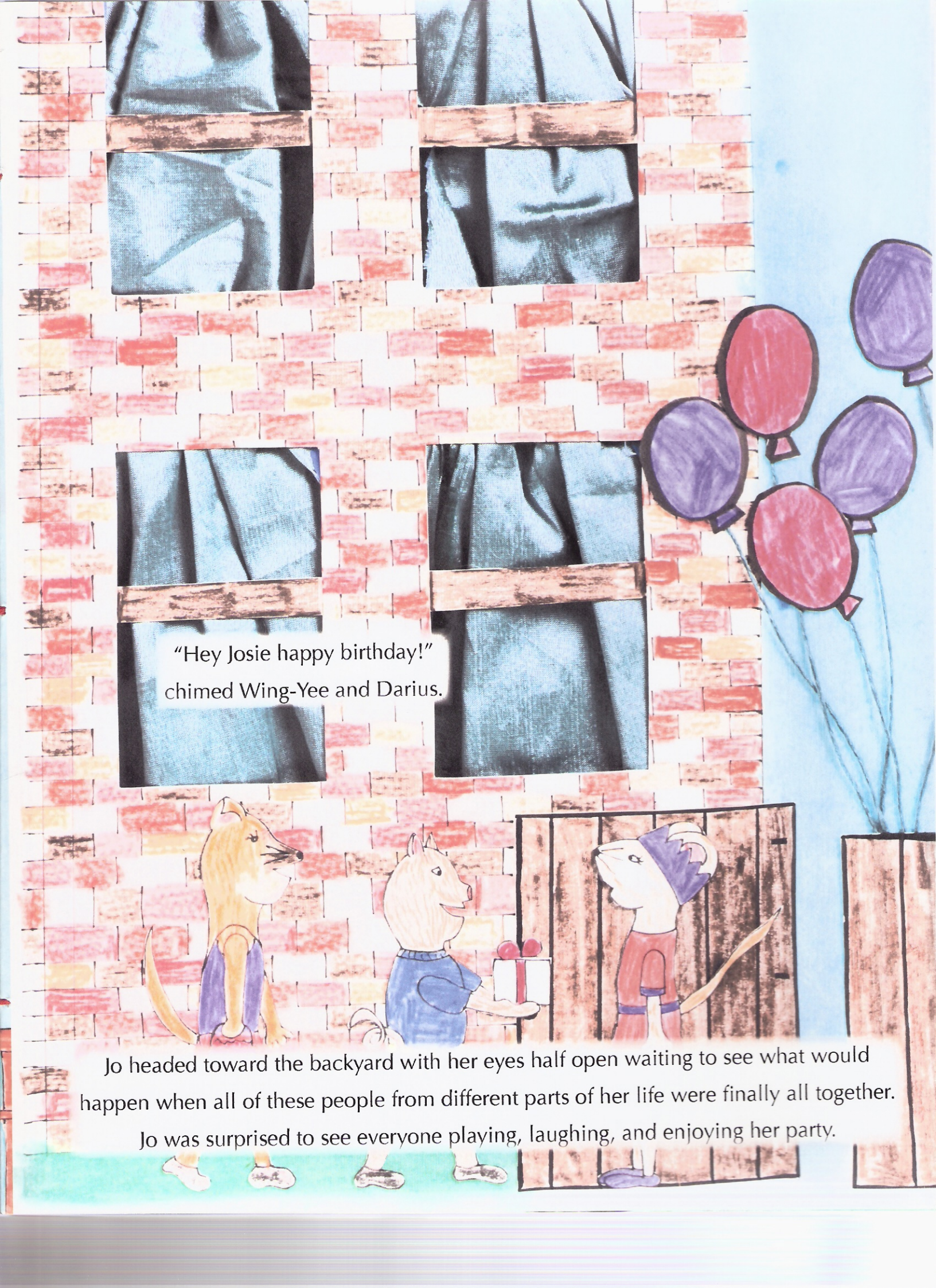
She greeted them at the gate and pointed them to the backyard where all of the party tables, balloons, and games were set-up.

"Hiya Jo-jo, ready for a great birthday party?" asked Coach Chris.

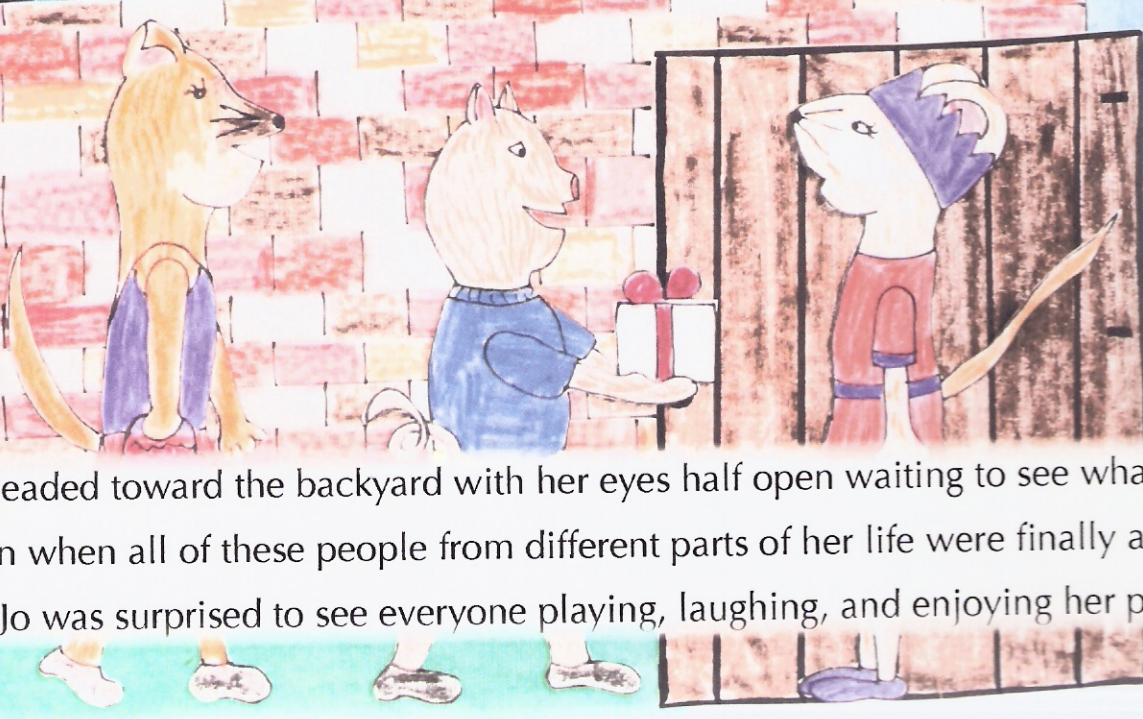


"Happy birthday Josephine," Grandma said. "Great day for a party!" Grandpa boomed.





"Hey Josie happy birthday!"  
chimed Wing-Yee and Darius.



Jo headed toward the backyard with her eyes half open waiting to see what would happen when all of these people from different parts of her life were finally all together. Jo was surprised to see everyone playing, laughing, and enjoying her party.

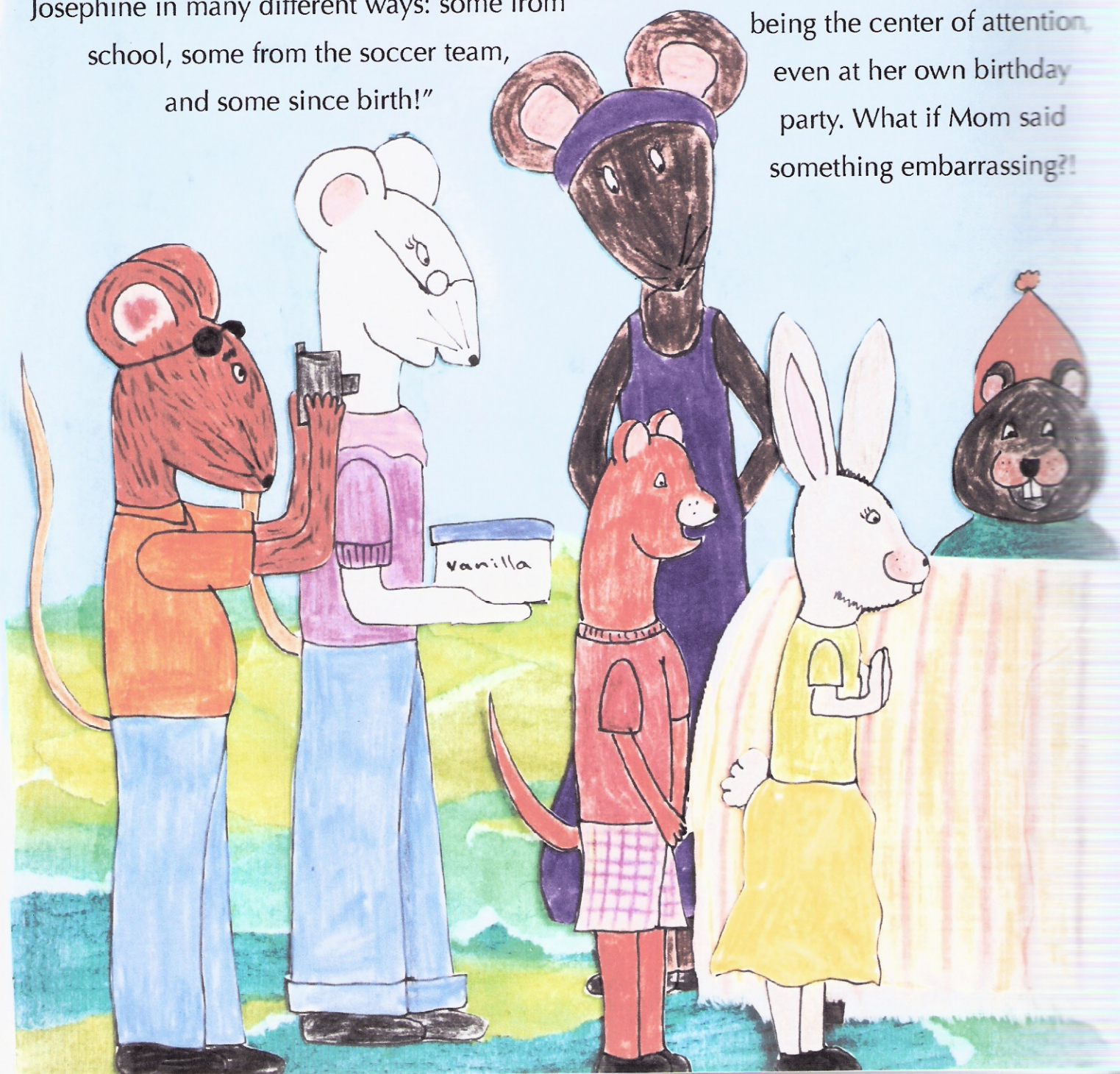


Everyone seemed to get along well playing party games in the backyard, but Jo knew that it was almost time for cake and ice cream. She wondered what name they would all sing in the happy birthday song. "It just isn't fair to have to pick only one name!" Jo thought.

Just then Mom gathered all of the party-goers together around the big picnic table and insisted that Jo sit in the big lawn chair at the end.

"Thank you all for coming!" Mom said with an extra big smile. "You all know our little Josephine in many different ways: some from school, some from the soccer team, and some since birth!"

Jo blushed. She didn't like being the center of attention, even at her own birthday party. What if Mom said something embarrassing?!





"Thank you all for coming to celebrate the birthday of such a great little person. Who's ready to sing Happy Birthday?!"

As Mom lighted the candles Jo squirmed in her seat. Once they were all lit, Mom began the song, "Happy birthday..."

Jo was so nervous she didn't hear the words.

"Happy birthday dear..." Jo took a deep breath. Suddenly the loudest most confusing sounds came out of everyone's mouths.

Wing-Yee and Darius yelled, "Josie!"

Coach Chris sang, "Jo-jo!"

Grandma replied, "Josephine!"

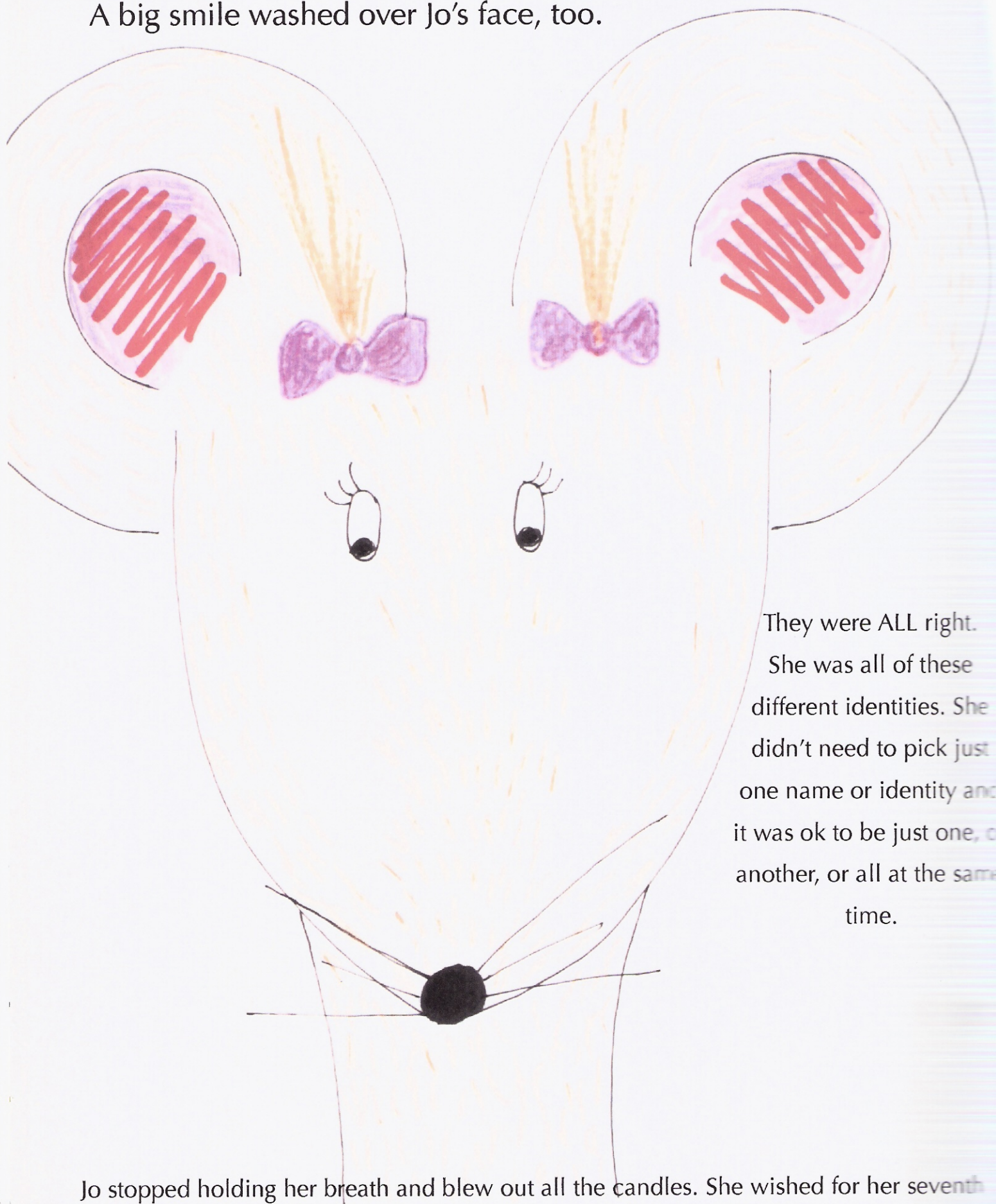
And Teddy screeched, "Jo!"

Grandpa just smiled.





A big smile washed over Jo's face, too.



They were ALL right.  
She was all of these  
different identities. She  
didn't need to pick just  
one name or identity and  
it was ok to be just one, or  
another, or all at the same  
time.

Jo stopped holding her breath and blew out all the candles. She wished for her seventh birthday party to be just as great as this one.